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... A political ace for CIA

In naming George Bush as head of the Central Intelligence Agency, President Ford has evidently decided to accept some political risks for an institution that is in the throes of deep reexamination, both internally and externally.

George Bush's competence is not an issue. Democrats as well as Republicans have praised his personal qualities. He has showed great energy, imagination and a certain flair for the unexpected in his present job as chief US representative in Peking. His personal integrity stood up commendably during his tenure as national chairman for the Republican Party in the year of Watergate. And he has a proven background as a hard-headed businessman and fine Congressman from Texas.

It is probably unfair that some Democrats have singled out his partisan past as the grounds for categorical opposition to his confirmation as head of the CIA. But that is a fact which the President will have to think about, exactly because of the reorganization crisis facing the agency. There is a danger that departmental nominations may be unduly scrutinized for their partisan content —

and that partisan content may be seen where none exists.

There are distinct plusses in Bush's background. Reorganization will mean compromise and Bush, the political figure, is familiar with that kind of give and take. Morale at the CIA is low because the agency is under attack. But a politician, highly tuned to public accountability, could help bridge the confidence gap between the agency and the public. Twice defeated as a candidate for the US Senate, George Bush has the reputation of being able to play the role of loser with grace and resilience. These are qualities that could be very useful in rebuilding the nation's intelligence agency.

In acting on the confirmation, the Senate ought not assume that Bush's political background automatically disqualifies him for the post. The Senate has every right to explore the question and it should do so in the course of confirmation hearings. That process should help both Congress and the Administration understand just what is expected from Bush in a CIA role. If that happens, the confirmation process will have served a creative purpose.